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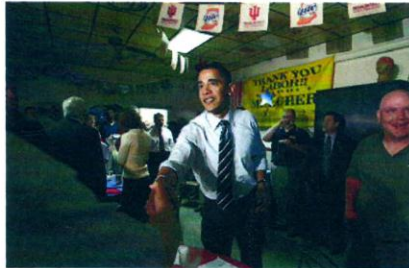


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Obama Gets Intimate in Indiana

By KAREN TUMULTY/ELKHART, INDIANA Sunday, May, 04, 2008



Barack Obama meets with labor union members at the Labor Temple in Evansville, Indiana, May 05, 2008. Emmanuel Dunand / AFP / Getty

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It had been 40 years — almost to the day — since Elkhart, Indiana, had last seen a presidential candidate in the flesh. Its local paper, *The Truth*, had commemorated the anniversary of Robert F. Kennedy's visit last Friday, wistfully editorializing that it wished one of this year's contenders would come to town and try to recreate the magic of the rally at which 3,000 people had gathered to hear RFK on Main Street.

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He has enjoyed a large lead in North Carolina, though some polls have suggested that race is tightening; the outcome in [Indiana is anyone's guess](#) at this point.

So, it was not surprising that when [Barack Obama's campaign](#) bus rolled up Sunday to the leafy corner of Superior and Bank streets, people came pouring out of their neat bungalows to meet him and his wife and his daughters. Walking up and down the street, Obama talked with Jody Coleman, a 33-year-old, about the cost of gasoline that has Coleman spending \$65 a week to fill up the tank of his truck each for the commute to his job at a shelving factory 18 miles away. Fourth-grade teacher Mary Rasp, a fifth-generation resident of Elkhart, had been strolling with her visiting 10-year-old grandson Sam, and rushed over to shake Obama's hand. A Democrat, she will be voting for Obama in Tuesday's Indiana primary, she said. "Yes I am — and I know Republicans who are switching, even within my family."

It has been said that Obama, for all his rock-concert-sized crowds and record-breaking fund raising, hasn't been able to close the deal with Democratic voters in a race that has stretched far longer than anyone expected. Obama's campaign knows that two wins on Tuesday would probably knock Hillary Clinton out of the race.


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Maybe that's why his campaign, in the final weekend before the Indiana and North Carolina contests, had a determinedly new feel — low-key, intimate, a series of Kodak moments. Or maybe it was Obama's way of trying to tell Hoosiers that he's not all that different than they are, whatever they might have heard about his controversial former pastor or the question of whether he wears an American flag on his lapel. In Indiana, there were two picnics, a roller-skating party, a game of pickup basketball. His daughters, 9-year-old Malia and 6-year-old Sasha, were on the campaign trail with Obama for the first time since Iowa. That was largely due to the fact that it was a weekend and they live in nearby Illinois — but it didn't hurt to remind people that this is a man with a family life, too.

Not every photo-op turned out quite as it had been planned, however. A potluck supper at a farmhouse in Kempton that had been built by one of Obama's great-uncles (who had been a member of the Indiana legislature), on land that had once been bought by his great-great-great-grandfather, had to be canceled after the weather turned frigid and gale-force gusts defeated the campaign's efforts to set up tables. Instead, the Obama family had to settle for an uncomfortably chilly walk around the property.

By the time word had gotten around the neighborhood in Elkhart that someone famous was on their street, the crowd had grown to around 200. But it was a mob with Indiana manners; they formed a line on the sidewalk and waited patiently for him to greet each in turn. One trembling teen-ager handed Obama a cell phone and asked him to say hello to her friend Hillary, a big Obama fan. "Hi Hillary!" Obama said with a mischievous grin, telling the crowd: "And she supports me."

"Oh, this isn't Hillary Clinton? Oh, Hillary Van Dyke," he deadpanned. "Nice to meet you! Thanks for your support."

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